

# Landowners work to improve our waters

**Iowa's waters need help. If future generations of Iowans are to have clean water for drinking, fishing, swimming, boating – we need to act now.**



Ron and Donna Tellier, with grandson Taylor Wadell, fish at an improved Slip Bluff Lake in Decatur County.

## **Iowa's waters need your help**

Excess sediment and nutrients, as well as contamination from fecal matter and other sources, are threatening Iowa's waters.

Because of these threats, more than 200 waterbodies are currently on Iowa's list of impaired waters. As more stream monitoring data is gathered, that number may grow.

But all of Iowa's waters need the help of landowners, whether it's improving poor water quality or maintaining good water quality.

More than 90 percent of Iowa is privately owned. To truly improve Iowa's waters, the involvement of all Iowans is needed. As landowners, you can make a large difference.

On the following pages, you can read about other Iowa landowners like you who use conservation practices on their farms. They are seeing improvements in their local waters, and financial and recreational benefits as well.

**Please join us in improving our state's waters for the generations to come.**

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Tom Beeler and Larry Jackson, Cedar Lake

## Landowners benefit from practices

About three miles upstream of Cedar Lake, a wetland and pond on Tom Beeler's farm help trap soil and treat tile water from terraces.

A large percentage of his 160-acre farm west of Winterset is terraced, and Beeler plans to reshape waterways and add more filter strips. Beeler also works with nutrient management.

"I'm not doing anything extraordinary," Beeler said. "It's just the way I feel I should conduct my farming business."

The two-acre pond and half-acre wetland, which is charged by the pond, provide both conservation and recreation benefits. Beeler has seen an increase in wildlife and uses the pond for fishing and swimming.

The conservation practices have also helped Beeler to conserve soil.

"No one wants to apply nutrients and see them wash

off before you can use them," he said.

The structures on Beeler's farm help keep excess soil and nutrients from washing into Cedar Creek, which flows into Cedar Lake. Beeler said it's just part of an overall effort to clean up the watershed.

"There's a lot of people who use Cedar Lake for recreation," Beeler said.

"With work, it could offer even more. But recreation is a fringe benefit — being a water source is the most important function."

Beeler's voluntary efforts are part of staying ahead of the game. If landowners weren't installing these practices now to improve water quality, it may become required in the future, he said.

"If enough of us do that, hopefully mandates won't come down," Beeler said.

Nearby, saving soil and keeping water cleaner inspired Larry Jackson to install a five-acre wetland on his property in 2003.

However, watershed projects are nothing new to Jackson, who has used no-till farming methods for over 20 years. He has also installed grassed waterways and filter strips.

Jackson's farm, located about three miles west of Winterset, has about 400 acres in row crops. The land drains into Cedar Creek, which in turn drains into Cedar Lake.

"A lot of people depend on that lake," Jackson said. Watershed projects would "benefit the city a great deal."

The wetland was installed through the continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) practice CP-9, or wetland creation on crop ground. The program offers annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to farmers wanting to build long-term conservation projects.

The cost of building a wetland was initially a consideration for Jackson, but CRP funding convinced him to go ahead with the wetland.

"It just sounded like a good deal," he said.

In addition to conservation benefits, the wetland also serves as a backup for fire departments. Jackson's farm features a dry hydrant, which allows firefighters to

draw water from the wetland in case of a nearby fire.



Tom Beeler



Larry Jackson



Tom Beeler's farm pond attracts wildlife and helps filter runoff.



The dry hydrant (inset) in Larry Jackson's wetland provides access for firefighters during rural fires.

*Jerry Bruxvoort, Muchakinock Creek*

## Saving the soil for the next generation

Jerry Bruxvoort has accepted his call to duty, and he hopes others will also step forward.



Jerry Bruxvoort

The Muchakinock Creek farmer uses conservation practices to improve water in the creek and save valuable Iowa topsoil in the southeast Iowa watershed.

“We’re put on this land to take care of it, and not to waste it. It’s your duty,” Bruxvoort said. “We’re all stewards of the land, and the next generation needs it just as much as we do.”

Bruxvoort grew up near Oskaloosa and began farming nearby in the Muchakinock watershed in 1962. Five years later, he purchased his father’s farm

and adjoining land near Eddyville, just two miles from where the creek joins with the Des Moines River. He raises corn, beans and cattle.

Ten years as a Mahaska Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) commissioner made Bruxvoort aware of problems in the watershed. In response, Bruxvoort has enrolled land in the Conservation Reserve Program, practices minimum tillage and contour farming, and has installed a pond, buffers and about three miles of terraces. He added that using a plan for highly erodible soil from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has helped as well.

“It saves the soil for the next generation, and we all like to have better water,” he said.

The largest benefit from his conservation practices is soil retention, especially where he’s installed terraces, he said. However, his pond also attracts wildlife like geese, with a handful that spend the winter there.

About 20 acres of old mines on Bruxvoort’s property add an extra challenge for soil conservation. He once worked for five years as a stripminer; today, he works to keep shale and sediment from the old mines out of his pond and Muchakinock Creek.

He’s installed a buffer around the pond and would like to do mine reclamation work when funding becomes available.

Bruxvoort would also like to install another pond and continues to serve the watershed as an assistant SWCD commissioner.

Jerry Bruxvoort’s pond catches excess sediment from nearby farm fields and abandoned mines in the Muchakinock Creek watershed, located near Oskaloosa in southeast Iowa.

“We’re all stewards of the land, and the next generation needs it just as much as we do.”  
~Jerry Bruxvoort



*Albert Roepke, South Fork Maquoketa River*

## One landowner’s homegrown conservation

Conservation practices are helping protect Albert Roepke’s farm, land that has been in his wife’s family for almost 150 years.

Roepke and his wife have spent 44 years on the farm, located in the western part of the South Fork Maquoketa River watershed, just north of Aurora in northeast Iowa. For 70 years, Roepke has worked on a farm and is well aware of problems in the watershed.

“I’ve seen more erosion in the last

20 years than in my lifetime,” said the 80-year-old Roepke. “The land is all worked now.”

To help save the soil, Roepke has been doing minimum tillage and no-till for years. He’s installed filter strips and plans to install a wetland. The 100-foot wide strips have helped slow runoff from the fields, and the wetland should add flood protection.

While he noted floods have hurt the pheasant population in his fields, Roepke said the filter strips also work to attract wildlife.

“I like to see pheasants in the morning,” he said. “And it’s always nice to hear quail.”



Albert Roepke’s filter strips slow runoff and provide wildlife habitat.



Todd Lenz, Rock Creek Lake

# Bringing GIS into the family tradition

New technology is allowing Todd Lenz to carry on a family farming tradition.



Three generations of conservation: Nathan, Todd and Dwight Lenz near one of their ponds.

Lenz, whose family farms land in the Rock Creek Lake watershed, located northeast of Newton, is a believer in using conservation practices. With the help of GIS mapping, the Lenz family is implementing new conservation projects on their land.

"It goes way back, past my dad's generation," Lenz said of conservation. "You're not going to grow anything if there's not soil there."

When the family had an area they wanted to address with a new

practice, field staff were brought in to create project maps and give cost estimates.

"If I can see it on paper, it helps me visualize things a lot better," Lenz said. "(Maps) help sell projects to farmers."

GIS maps detailing soil loss information have been used to help locate and plan a number of pond structures on the family's land.

The ponds, located in priority areas, have helped stabilize erosion, created a recreation area for the family, given a new home to wildlife and allowed native prairie plants to return to pastures.

The Lenz family uses a number of other conservation practices, including terraces, contour farming and waterways, and 90 to 95 percent of the land is farmed as no-till.

"There's not a lot of effort to return your investment," Lenz said. "You can be well-paid by being conservation-minded."

**You can be well-paid by being conservation-minded.**

**~Todd Lenz**



Prairie flowers look out over one of the Lenz's ponds.

## Funding sources to help get you started

Assistance with a number of cost-share, low-interest loan and other programs is available from your local Natural Resources Conservation Service or Farm Service Agency office.

Low-interest loans are also available from the Iowa Water Quality Loan Fund. For more information, visit [www.iowasrf.com](http://www.iowasrf.com).

### For more information:

**Steve Hopkins, DNR Nonpoint Program Coordinator, (515) 281-6402**

The publication of this document has been funded by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources through a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under the Federal Nonpoint Source Management Program (Section 319 of the Clean Water Act). Federal regulations prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex or handicap. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility as described above, or if you desire further information, please write to Iowa DNR, Wallace State Office Building, 502 E. 9th St. Des Moines, IA 50319.



PRINTED ON  
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A publication of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 2005. Produced by Jessie Rolph Brown, photography by Clay Smith.